LABRADOR AND NORTH NEWFOUNDLAND

LABRADOR AND NORTH NEWFOUNDLAND

AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF
THE WORK
OF THE INTERNATIONAL
GRENFELL ASSOCIATION

PUBLISHED BY A. E. G.
BOSTON, MASS., U. S. A. : : 1924.

Copyright, 1924
BY
WILFRED T. GRENFELL

Printed in the United States

THE INTERNATIONAL GRENFELL ASSOCIATION

"Labrador was discovered by the English. There is nothing in it of any value." So ran the terse description of the old cartographer. However, thinking people are beginning to understand the influence of cold climates on the formation of robust character and physique, and to value increasingly the contribution which the men of the North have to offer to civilization today, and to sane and effective life in the future.

Newfoundland is proud of being Britain's oldest Colony, and knows itself to be second to none in loyalty to the mother country. Newfoundlanders, therefore, feel a justifiable regret and surprise that many people in England and the Dominions are ignorant of some of the essential facts about the Island itself, and its dependency, Labrador. Even the exact position of these countries on the earth's surface is a matter of speculation to some, though few would go so far as the man who stated to the writer that he had always thought of Labrador as an Island in the Southern Pacific, noted for the export of bananas.

The latitude of Labrador is the same as that of England, Battle Harbour at the southern end being approximately in the same degree as London, while Cape Chidley at the North, corresponds with the North Cape of Scotland. The mean temperature of Labrador is possibly lower than that of Alaska, due to the fact that its shores are perpetually bathed in the icy waters of the polar current, while the beneficial effects of the Japanese current are felt in the latter country. The climate of the north end of Newfoundland is damper and more trying than that of Labrador itself, since it is a peninsula jutting up into and dividing the arctic stream. Climatically, there is a sharp demarcation between southern and northern Newfoundland. The timber that so abundantly covers the valleys of south Labrador is ever bringing an increasing number of pulp and paper industries farther eastward from the St. Lawrence district and Quebec. Moreover, there can be no question but that one day Labrador has

valuable secrets to reveal to the explorer and to the miner. Many of the wonderful fjords of the north are still unexplored, but in the not distant future the gorgeous scenery, bracing summer climate, and innumerable opportunities for fishing and similar sports, and for scientific work, are certain to attract a large tourist traffic to this unrivalled field for rest and recreation.

The dominant industry of the whole Colony is the fishery, the wresting from the well-stocked waters of the North Atlantic, its great "harvest of the sea." Cod, salmon, halibut, herring, capelin, lobster, are all contributions whose value to the world's food supply no one denies; and these are found here in abundance. Though some twenty thousand people leave the Labrador Coast and sail south with their schooners loaded with the season's catch at the close of the brief summer, some alternative industry is imperative for the fishermen who remain in the country. They, therefore, move in from the Coast up the long bays and inlets and engage in trapping the valuable fur-bearing animals, such as fox, lynx, mink, marten, and ermine.

The people of Newfoundland and the Newfoundland-Labrador are, naturally, of English, Scotch or Irish extraction, men whose ancestors came over some generations ago with the old fishing firms and fur-trading companies. They are Christians of a devout and simple faith. In the north end of Labrador there still remain some thousand or more Eskimo, among whom the Moravian Mission has been carrying on an heroic work for over a century and a half. In the interior of the country a few bands of Indians still rove; but the native peoples have been gradually pushed back, and have more or less succumbed to the advance of Anglo-Saxon civilization. Naturally, there has been intermarriage between the natives and the settlers, so as one travels farther northward along the Labrador Coast one finds a fringe of half-breeds mingling with the whites.

At Blanc Sablon, on the Straits of Belle Isle, is the division point between the Canadian-Labrador and the Newfoundland-Labrador. The latter is a strip of land stretching northward along the eastern seaboard of the Province of Ungava as far as Hudson's Bay Straits. The

THE HARVEST OF THE SEA

exact definition of the boundary between the Canadian and Newfoundland territories is still in dispute between the two countries.

Doctor Wilfred Thomason Grenfell was born in 1865 at Parkgate, Cheshire, England. He is a graduate of Marlborough School, Queen's College, Oxford, and the University of London. He was House Surgeon at the London Hospital under the late Sir Frederic Treves, who throughout his life was a loyal friend of the Doctor's. He comes rightly by his love for the sea, for he numbers Sir Richard Grenville of the "Revenge" among his ancestors. The Doctor holds the title of C.M.G., the degree of honourary M.D. from Oxford, he is a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. He has been given also the degree of M.A. by Harvard University, and other degrees by Toronto University and Williams College.

Some thirty-two years ago, at the suggestion of Lord Southborough, who was then Sir Francis Hopwood, Dr. Grenfell sailed from Great Yarmouth for St. John's, Newfoundland, in the ninety-ton ketch "Albert," belonging to the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen. The tonnage of the ship was the same as that in which, just four hundred years previous, John Cabot had essayed the same voyage in his stout little craft the "Matthew." For five years previous to 1892 Doctor Grenfell had been carrying on a medical and surgical work for the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen among the fishermen in the North Sea, and as far as the Icelandic fisheries and the Coast of Norway. He wished to see whether similar activities could not be started among the fishermen in the cold waters north of the "Roaring Forties."

The following year, at the request of some of the authorities in St. John's, Newfoundland, and of others interested in the fisheries, he returned with another doctor and two trained nurses, and that year opened the first small hospital on the Labrador Coast, at Battle Harbour, the eastern entrance of the Strait of Belle Isle. In the summer of 1894 a second hospital was built on Indian Harbour Island, two hundred miles north of Battle Harbour. Four other hospitals

A LABRADOR AMBULANCE

have followed, being dotted along the Labrador and North Newfoundland Coasts at intervals of about two hundred miles, one of them being located at Harrington on the Canadian Labrador. When the sea freezes over the work of some of the stations is moved to winter quarters at the heads of the bays where the fishermen congregate for trapping. Four nursing stations have been added subsequently, as the funds necessary for their construction and maintenance could be raised, so that now there is a chain of small "hostels" located some fifty miles apart.

The most northerly hospital, situated at the head of Lake Melville, one hundred and fifty miles inland from the Atlantic seaboard, has just been completely destroyed by fire. The loss is serious, not only financially to the International Grenfell Association, but as affecting every aspect of the life of the people of that section of the Coast, who looked to it as the centre for medical, social, and educational help.

In connection with the hospitals, dental clinics are maintained; and for the past fourteen years the people have been greatly helped by the able and unselfish volunteer services of a well-known eye specialist, who has come North each season and given sight to many blind folk, in a country where physical capacity is of literally vital importance.

The whole aim of the work of the International Grenfell Association is to help the deserving to secure reasonable assistance in sickness and accident.

A number of child welfare clinics are carried on by peripatetic or stationary Units along the coasts of North Newfoundland and Labrador. It was found that the class method, where parents and children come together for conference with the nutrition workers and doctors, was a very practical way to instil rudimentary principles of health, and the wise utilization of procurable foods, so that coming generations might suffer progressively less and less from those diseases of malnutrition and unhygienic living conditions which are a bitter handicap to the fishermen.

An attempt is being made to meet the problem of derelict and orphan children by two Children's Homes. One is located just outside Cartwright, Labrador (a spot

"A CHILD WELFARE CLINIC"

made famous as the home of George Cartwright for so many years), and accommodates between forty and fifty children. A special endeavour is being made here to have as many of the children as possible return to their relatives for the fishing season, so that not only may they be a help in the bread-winning problem of their immediate circle, but also may not get out of touch with the life of the Coast. This Home, therefore, is more in the nature of an Orphanage Boarding School. The other one, situated at St. Anthony, at the extreme north tip of Newfoundland, affords a home for sixty-nine orphans who live there the year around. After many years of effort the International Grenfell Association was able to raise a sufficient sum, aside from the general annual budget, to replace the original flimsy frame structure with a fine concrete building. Doctor Grenfell tells the following story of the beginning of the orphanages — "I had been summoned to a lonely headland, fifty miles from our hospital at Indian Harbour, to see a very sick family. Among the spruce trees in a small hut lived a Scotch salmon fisher, his wife and five little children. When we anchored off the promontory we were surprised to receive no signs of welcome. When we landed and entered the house we found the mother dead on the bed and the father lying on the floor dying. Next morning we improvised two coffins, contributed from the wardrobes of all hands enough black material for a 'seemly' funeral, and later, steaming up the bay to a sandy stretch of land, buried the two parents with all the ceremonies of the Church — and found ourselves left with five little mortals in black sitting on the grave mound. Thus we began what developed into our Children's Homes with the balance of the stock."

All attempts to better a civilization must ultimately depend on the children, so every effort is being made to afford them the best possible chances for moral, mental and physical equipment for life. The International Grenfell Association carries on a large permanent school for about a hundred children at the station where the largest hospital is located, and in addition to this, each summer volunteers from Canada and the United States go to about twenty remote little fishing villages and there maintain elementary

THE CHILDREN AT HOME

schools during the months of open water. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador are greatly handicapped in their intellectual development by the so-called denominational school system which still prevails. All Government grants for educational purposes are allotted according to religious denomination. If the amount were lumped and education in Government Schools were made compulsory for all children up to a certain age, a fair chance would be given for the development of the inherent abilities of the people.

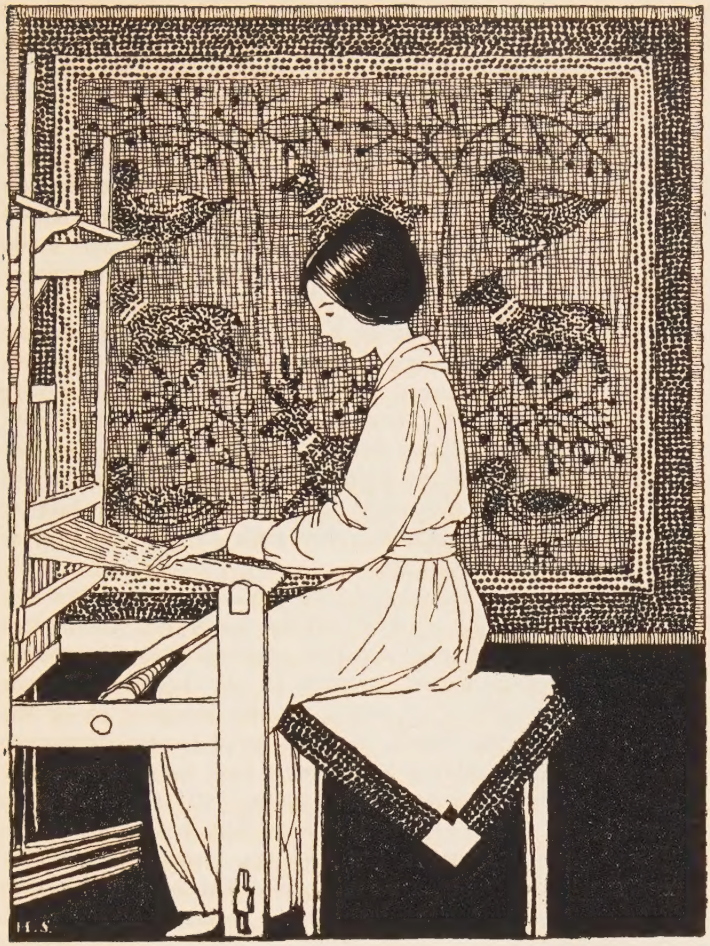
Many children who have attended the International Grenfell Association undenominational schools, or have been brought up in its Orphanages, are given opportunities for supplementary training in technical subjects in Canada and the United States. The sole object of this branch of the work is to use the more able young men and women as instruments for the betterment of their own land and people. As a recognition of the opportunity which they have had, they are expected to return to their country in some capacity, for two years at least, and disseminate the knowledge they have gained. Thus, today returned students are filling posts on the Staff of the International Grenfell Association as nurses, school teachers, industrial teachers and workers, mechanical and electrical engineers, plumbers, carpenters, tinsmiths, dressmakers, domestic science and household arts instructors, and three have been trained in business colleges.

Along economic lines work has been done in establishing home industries and developing those native arts which have been practiced among the people for many generations. Nowhere can one find such beautiful workmanship in the old-fashioned hooked mats as on the Coast. This industry has been particularly stressed both as to bringing the quality of all work up to a standard, and in giving the women patterns of local scenes, so that the mats have really become tapestry representations of aspects of life in the North. Dog-driving, reindeer sledges, bears on icebergs on the frozen sea, fleets of schooners beating their way "down North" through the field ice in June, wild geese flying over the spruce forests, silver foxes chasing the arctic hare over the barrens — all find their place in this picture gallery of

SCHOOL DAYS IN NEWFOUNDLAND

the Northland. These mats are charming for children's nurseries, for bath rooms or as tapestries for the walls. The weaving of wool homespun, old pattern hand-woven bed spreads and other articles, the making of beautiful baskets out of the native grass, all help to turn the otherwise unremunerative hours of idleness during the long winter months into products profitable not only to the family exchequer but to the general standard of living. You cannot make a clean mat in a dirty home. The effect of the industrial development on the women of the Coast is very marked. For the first time they have realized that their work has a monetary value, they have been able to earn a little pocket money, and they have found a channel for the outlet of their creative abilities other than that afforded by the endless and arduous duties of their homes. A toy industry has been introduced, chiefly to give work to convalescent patients or to those whose physical disabilities prevent their return to the exacting demands of the fishery. As one goes farther north along the Labrador Coast one finds beautiful embroidery work done on deerskin either in beads or silk. The whole industrial effort is designed as an entering wedge for the betterment of the economic conditions of North Newfoundland and Labrador and to spread the gospel of real brotherly help. In order to help introduce a cash method of trade instead of the truck system that largely prevailed along the Labrador only thirty years ago, a string of small coöperative distributive stores were started. They have undergone many vicissitudes, some have failed through lack of adequate trained management, others have succeeded, but the whole venture has accomplished its purpose — namely the substitution of cash for barter and the consequent emancipation of many people in that aspect of their economic life. Reindeer from Lapland were also introduced, and other experimental efforts made — such as a coöperative lumber mill — to enable the land as well as the sea to aid in the upbuilding of a people.

The deleterious influence of the liquor traffic and its inevitable effect of demoralizing and impoverishing its victims was never marked among the seamen of Labrador and North Newfoundland, but as there was no adequate



THE INDUSTRIAL DEPARTMENT

provision made for their safety and comfort at the Capital of the Island, whither they went to purchase supplies and outfit and to market their catch each year, the Grenfell Association decided to deflect funds, much needed for hospital and social work in the northern part of the country, and erect a large seamen's institute at headquarters. The building has been running for twelve years. It is fitted with just the necessary things to make fishermen at home and afford them a clean and safe welcome on shore. Previous to its erection the only alternative to remaining in the cabin of their schooner was the saloon. The King George the Fifth Institute, named for our sailor King, and whose corner stone was laid by him on the day of his coronation by means of an electrical device arranged by the courtesy of the Cable Company, has probably been a vital factor in combating the liquor interests. Many men have learned to swim in the fine swimming pool of the Institute. Owing to the very cold temperature of our sub-arctic waters our seamen find it difficult to learn. The entire top floor of the building is devoted to work among girls.

There are no roads in North Newfoundland and Labrador. In summer the sea provides the means of communication between the scattered hamlets, while in winter the whole snow-covered and frozen country is one broad highway. Owing to the nature of the work, and the mode of life of the people it was found that a hospital steamer was necessary for reaching the outlying settlements and for unifying the activities of the Mission. From 1900 to 1922 the good ship "Strathcona," the gift of the late Lord Strathcona who lived so long on the Labrador and laid the foundations of his career there, did yeoman service. She was sunk in a heavy gale just as she was going into winter quarters at the close of the season.

In summer the International Grenfell Association is endeavouring to carry on its medical and social activities, the industrial work, the lending libraries, the clothing department, and the legal matters incident to the life of the people, not only at the hospital and nursing stations, but by means of the hospital steamer, a fleet of yawls with auxiliary power attached to the various hospitals and operated by the doctors

LAPLANDERS IN THEIR ADOPTED HOME

in charge, and through the travelling Child Welfare and Industrial Units. In winter when the sea is frozen the work maintained outside the stations is done by dog-team transportation.

Starting from very small beginnings, the work has grown proportionally as interest has increased and support been secured either in personal service or money. For some years after Doctor Grenfell went on the Coast, the management was under the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, but as people in Canada and the United States and Newfoundland became more and more practically allied with his work and as the activities inaugurated by him grew in variety and number, it was felt wise to unify the contributing societies in the various Anglo-Saxon Countries into one body. Accordingly, about twelve years ago, the International Grenfell Association was incorporated under the laws of Newfoundland. Its Board is made up of two Directors from the Labrador Medical Mission of Canada, two from the Newfoundland Grenfell Association, two from the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen in England, two from the Grenfell Association of America and two from the New England Grenfell Association. This Board directs the policies, helps raise the funds in the four countries represented (all of which contribute to the support of the work), and administers and accounts for all monies and other materials given — the whole being under the direction of Doctor Grenfell as superintendent and founder.

The International Grenfell Association is an interdenominational body, whose Directors and Staff are composed entirely of laymen, with the exception of the Reverend Henry Gordon, who for many years has done such noble work on the Labrador, and whom the Staff are proud to number among them. It goes without saying that there have been clergy of all denominations along the North Newfoundland and Labrador Coasts for generations. These men have done, and are doing, noble work. However, no doctors had gone to live on the coast previous to the coming of Doctor Grenfell on the "Albert." The workers are of every creed and sect, the qualifications for appointment being first, the desire to serve, secondly the training and capacity to fill some special

THE BROAD HIGHWAY

post, and lastly often enough the ability of the applicant to pay his own expenses for the privilege. The larger part of the work is being carried on by volunteers from Canada and the United States, England and Newfoundland. Without their continued and loyal help it would never have been possible at all; though they all say they love the opportunity, thus given them, of intimate contact with a strong, self-reliant, simple and loveable people. The workers all claim, moreover, that if they needed any other compensation for the help they have been able to offer, they would find it in the circumstances of life and the physical setting of the work.

No one realizes more fully than Doctor Grenfell himself that although his name has come to be intimately connected in the mind of the outside world with the Mission in Labrador and North Newfoundland, but for the devoted, unselfish, unrecognized and long-continued service of scores of loyal colleagues for a period of nearly thirty-two years, even such contribution as the International Grenfell Association has been able to make toward the moral, economic and social development of an outpost of the Empire would never have been realized. The demands of life in the remote section of the Empire where his life work has been carried on have forced him to combine in himself many callings not included in his own profession of surgery and medicine. For many years he has been the local Justice of the Peace, and agent for Lloyd's Underwriters; he is also a Master Mariner, acting as captain on his own steamer. The most trying part of the work he has been obliged to do has been the lecturing — a function made imperative, however, by the needs of the people and the recurrent call for support of the various institutions. Those who know him realize that the doing of the actual work on the Coast is no sacrifice; he thoroughly enjoys every aspect of his life in the North.

About two years ago a partial endowment was raised to safeguard the future of some of the activities of the Association. The yearly income from this, however, does not meet even half the budget, so that the hospital work, the work among children, the industrial and other social activities are still dependent on voluntary subscriptions and donations of personal service, money, clothing, and supplies. The

people themselves are giving the Association loyal support up to the limit of their capacity. The Newfoundland Government has given an annual grant for many years.

Information can be obtained and gifts may be sent to the office of the International Grenfell Association, Seamens Institute, St. John's, Newfoundland. The Association also publishes an illustrated quarterly magazine entitled "Among the Deep Sea Fishers," which deals exclusively with Labrador and North Newfoundland. Subscriptions to it and membership in the Association for one year cost $2.00 (two dollars).

It is the privilege of all who believe in life as a worthwhile venture and not a selfish tragedy to extend to their fellow-creatures the message of love in the forms in which they themselves would most wish it. This privilege the members of the International Grenfell Association have been claiming, and hope to continue to claim for many years to come.

"The beautiful is but the visible splendour of the true. The enjoyment of a visit to the Labrador Coast may consist not alone in the impressions of the scenery; there may be added the deeper pleasure of reading out the history of noble landscapes, the sculptured monuments of elemental strife and revolutions of distant ages."

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

BOOKS BY DR. GRENFELL

"A Labrador Doctor,"
"Northern Neighbours,"
"Adrift on an Icepan,"
"Down North on the Labrador,"
"Labrador Days,"
"The Adventure of Life,"
—*Published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. Boston, Mass.*

"A Labrador Doctor,"
"Northern Neighbours,"
—*also published by Hodder & Stoughton, London.*

"Labrador and its People,"
—*Published by Macmillan, New York, N. Y.*

"What Life Means To Me," and series,
—*Published by The Pilgrim Press, Boston, Mass.*